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Research Assignment

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The Monolingual Propaganda

**Introduction**

A quick glimpse into the history of the planet illustrates a strikingly vivid imbalance of power perpetuating to current day. Cultural erosion and assimilation has been an unavoidable and deliberate reality perpetuated by a stronger power- this essay will explore, in particular, the Language Propaganda that culminated in the colonization of various countries in the last century, and its effects on “The Other”. Another term for this can be “Linguistic Genocide”, that was discussed by the UN in 1948 when they conducted preparatory work for the International Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, in Article III.[[1]](#endnote-2)

“Any deliberate act committed with intent to destroy the language, religion or culture of a national, racial or religious group on grounds of national or racial origin or religious belief, such as (1) Prohibiting the use of the language of the group in daily intercourse or in schools, or the printing and circulation of publications in the language of the group; and (2) Destroying or preventing the use of libraries, museums, schools, historical monuments, places of worship or other cultural institutions and objects of the group.”[[2]](#endnote-3)

**The birth of Monolingualism and its prevalence today**:

The purpose of this report is to illustrate the current lingual set-up across the globe, examining it’s history and the repercussions associated with this set-up. Languages worldwide are dying out. The prognosis of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is that only 5 to 10 percent of the approximately seven thousand spoken languages in modern times may still be used by the year 2100.[[3]](#endnote-4) There are various reasons behind these statistics dealing both with historical factors and the contemporary realm we live in. An examination into the contemporary world of language usage and education presents the imbalance parallel to political agenda also linked to the economically dominant modern world.

**Worldwide Languages**:

In terms of language study; very often the medium of education depends entirely on the colonial occupation within that country. Citizens themselves feel that studying in the foreign language is more practical if they seek to send their students abroad for higher education.

“For instance, in [Algeria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algeria), [Morocco](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morocco) and [Tunisia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunisia), [French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_language) is the most widely-studied language besides the native [Arabic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic), while in [Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt) and the [Gulf countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_countries) (such as the [United Arab Emirates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Arab_Emirates), [Kuwait](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuwait), and [Oman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oman)), [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language) is the primary supplementary language. The teaching of languages other than Arabic is uncommon in some countries, such as [Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq), the [Palestinian Authority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_Authority), [Saudi Arabia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudi_Arabia), [Syria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria), and [Yemen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yemen). In these countries, English and other foreign languages tend to be offered as subjects only in certain, wealthier schools.”[[4]](#endnote-5)

So present-day monolingualism, is not a result of an enforcement by a ruling power, but more simply a reaction to the current environment.

“Pragmatic parents tend to see advantages in raising their children mostly or entirely in English, the language of social and economic mobility. Thus every step toward modernization puts the indigenous tongue at a greater disadvantage.”[[5]](#endnote-6)

Although on the surface this appears to be very dogmatic, one cannot ignore the social impact perpetuated by stifling one’s language. Just as the modern world brings with it it’s own material and consumerist jargon- the former world before colonial rule had with it a cultural diversity stemming from a wide array of languages. Social and cultural norms are carried forward through the communication within these languages passed on from generation to generation. But this isn’t an unknown phenomenon- it is one that has been realized and exploited throughout the history of colonialism, and the deliberate classifications of ‘The Other’.

There are other theories that accredit the depletion of these languages to various factors. In this article the author picks up ideas from Fishman’s Criteria (1991) to show this:

“How should we conceptualize the causes of language shift? Rather than rely on Darwinian metaphors, Fishman (1991, pp. 55-67) offers criteria with fewer semantic pitfalls. In place of changing "ecology," he cites "dislocations"– physical, economic, social, and cultural – affecting a language community. These include a group's dispersal from its historic homeland, subordination to a socioeconomic system in which its tongue commands limited power and prestige, and the weakening of traditional bonds through contact with modern, atomized democracies that elevate individual freedom over communal values.” [[6]](#endnote-7)

This theory could spring up the argument, that such situations that create the atmosphere for a language to fade away are simply the situations prevalent in the modern world. Urbanization can create a dispersal of residents from the town to the city, allowing for the shedding pervious ties and norms to adopt modern ones. Essentially any contact with the modern world and a new culture that seem so much more appealing can be adopted- but then one has to ask what constitutes the modern world, how is it communicated and what makes it so appealing? One could quite accredit this to materialism and the whole consumerist culture stemming from the global economic setup- but whether consumerism is linked to colonization can create another argument about languages dying out.

Historically, consumerism echoes anything to do with materialism and the Industrial Revolution. The exploitation of various colonized countries was done under the mask of industry, the East India Company of the subcontinent for example resulted in British rule for 200 years-it also allowed for an unraveling of culture and replacement of social norms, including language. This was particularly evident with the Natives of America when the U.S adopted its assimilation policies, such as the 1873 Minnesota law requiring that only English be spoken in the classroom.[[7]](#endnote-8)

“The use of a group's language can be prohibited directly or indirectly. Books in prohibited languages have been burned. Earlier, the use of indigenous and minority groups' languages was often prohibited by physically punishing people, especially children, who used them. Many children, all over the world, have been beaten, left without food, locked in dark places, and forced to drag stones or wear other heavy objects around their necks just for uttering a few words in their own languages in schools. Shame is the tool most frequently used: Schoolchildren speaking a banned language have been made to stand in corners or in front of the class, carry objects showing that they have broken the rules, write a sentence such as "I am an idiot" countless times on a blackboard, or pay fines. In other instances, they have been transformed into traitors and spies, escaping punishment or receiving some small reward if they reveal to their teachers the identity of other children using the forbidden language.” [[8]](#endnote-9)

1. Works Cited

   http://www.enotes.com/genocide-encyclopedia/linguistic-genocide [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.enotes.com/genocide-encyclopedia/linguistic-genocide [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. <http://www.enotes.com/genocide-encyclopedia/propaganda> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_language> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. <http://www.enotes.com/genocide-encyclopedia/propaganda> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. <http://www.enotes.com/genocide-encyclopedia/propaganda> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. http://www.enotes.com/genocide-encyclopedia/linguistic-genocide [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. http://www.enotes.com/genocide-encyclopedia/linguistic-genocide [↑](#endnote-ref-9)